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SUBJECT: KARIM AGAIN MAKES PROMISES AFTER MILITARY SETBACKS

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Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

11. (C) Summary: Peter Karim, leader of the Front for National Integration (FNI) militia in the DRC's northeastern Ituri District, has promised to surrender a number of his fighters following several weeks of successful operations by the Congolese military (FARDC) which have left the FNI isolated and cut off from re-supply. GDRC officials are skeptical Karim will follow through. End summary.

12. (C) FNI militia leader Peter Karim told MONUC-Bunia February 23 he planned to surrender 200 fighters for demobilization on February 27 at Doi, about 50 miles northeast of Bunia. According to a MONUC political affairs officer, Karim said he is willing to surrender provided the army withdraws from the area and does not threaten the surrendering fighters. The officer told us he advised Karim to surrender without any conditions, and promised him that MONUC would provide security for his forces in transit to Doi.

13. (C) Karim has made similar promises in the past and Congolese officials are skeptical he will follow through. Ituri District Commissioner Petronille Vaweka told us February 24 she believed Karim is engaged in yet another attempt to buy time, reposition his militia, and purchase more weapons and ammunition. Outgoing Vice Minister of Defense Bernard Mena, who represented the government in negotiations with Ituri militias late last year, was equally doubtful. He told us February 22 that negotiations with Karim have proven ineffective and argued that only force would resolve the Karim problem.

14. (C) Karim's latest promise follows several weeks of FARDC operations against his fighters. FARDC troops initiated attacks on FNI positions around Fataki, about 30 miles northeast of Bunia, beginning in late January, and captured several small towns and villages during the first two weeks of February. Mena told us the army was able to cut off Karim from his supply routes to Uganda, effectively cornering him in a small area of Djugu territory, located well to the north of Bunia. FARDC Ituri Operations Commander General Vainqueur Mayala suspended operations February 16 to allow Karim the opportunity to surrender and to consolidate FARDC positions for a potential second round of fighting.

15. (C) Mena said that operations against Karim have been successful because of a revised strategy. In the past, Mena said, the FARDC typically departed recently-liberated areas after a day or two, only to have militia forces return. He explained the FARDC is now holding villages and towns for a longer period, which he said has denied the FNI the opportunity to re-supply and avoid further confrontation.

¶6. (C) Mena told us the recent fighting has decimated Karim's ranks. He claimed over 100 FNI fighters were killed, including nearly 80 in a three-day period in mid-February. The FNI is now believed to number approximately 500 armed fighters. MONUC officials have not been able to verify exact casualties, but reported that at least several dozen FNI fighters have been killed.

¶7. (C) Karim has pledged at least twice before to surrender his militia and report for military integration. In July 2006 he signed an agreement with the GDRC to integrate his forces into the FARDC in exchange for a military commission and the promise of amnesty. He agreed in November 2006 to a similar accord, also signed by Ituri militia leaders Cobra Matata and Mathieu Ngudjolo. Matata and Ngudjolo have since surrendered several hundred fighters and ceased hostilities against the FARDC. Karim, although he was promised a commission as an army colonel, has refused to honor either agreement and continued attacks on the FARDC.

¶8. (C) Comment: Karim has previously used promises to surrender in order to stall and emerge stronger. FARDC operations have significantly weakened his position. If he does not follow through, continued military pressure appears to be the only effective measure to deal with the threat posed by his militia. End comment.

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